How I Learned Batak: Studying the Angkola Batak Language in 1970s New Order Indonesia

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How were "local languages" and "local cultures" constituted during the New Order? How was the visiting anthropologist construed during the Soeharto regime? How were anthropology and "culture" itself imagined in New Order times by diverse parties engaged in these profoundly politicized (if veiled) narrative discourses? John Pemberton's findings about New Order cultural imaginaries set out in his *On the Subject of "Java"*[2] provide macro-level insight and excellent historical grounding for beginning to answer these questions, as Pemberton focuses on constructions of so-called traditions revolving around the royal court of Surakarta. This present essay offers an autobiographical, experiential parallel to Pemberton's work by setting out my memories of working with a seventy-six-year-old retired schoolteacher who taught me the Angkola Batak language in 1974 as part of my first term of fieldwork in Sipirok, South Tapanuli, North Sumatra. My teacher's pedagogies and language ideology were shaped by Dutch colonial visions of language and learning; his way of presenting his home language to me as a brilliant, civilizing gift was also animated by his discomfort and skepticism with the New Order government's negative stereotypes about so-called

[1] Indonesian language and literature specialist Professor Sylvia Tiwon of the University of California-Berkeley first suggested to me that I write about my Batak language learning experiences. Without her suggestion, I would not have launched into this essay. English professor Helen Whall of Holy Cross gave early drafts a careful reading, for which I am deeply grateful. A reviewer for *Indonesia* also made many astute suggestions. My early research was sponsored by the Lembaga Ilmu Pengatahuan Indonesia and funded by the Social Science Research Council.

[2] John Pemberton, *On the Subject of "Java"* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994).

minority languages and minority peoples. This experimental memoir of language learning suggests that New Order "control" of places like South Tapanuli was ragged and superficial.

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Learning to speak a language means learning a world, anthropologists and ethnolinguists sometimes claim. This was also the conviction of several forthrightly opinionated retired schoolteachers from Sumatra's rural South Tapanuli district in the mid-1970s—a group of no-nonsense Angkola Batak older men and women in the market town of Sipirok who took firm charge of my language-learning education there when I was a young (read: callow) visiting American anthropology PhD student from 1974 to 1977. They were teaching me to speak and read the Angkola Batak language. As our lingua franca we used Indonesian, the national language. I had already studied this in an intensive way in American universities before coming to Sumatra. This period of my fieldwork in Sipirok took place about a decade into the installation of the new national Indonesian government, the New Order. In power from 1965 to May 1998, the New Order was a thinly veiled military regime that stressed headlong economic development and centralized control of the ethnically and linguistically diverse country under the guidance of generals.[3] In 1974, the county district (*kecamatan*) and town of Sipirok were caught up in fits of New Order-sponsored *pembangunan*, economic development.

In the 1970s, some in South Tapanuli felt that the New Order was a scandal, an insult to actual Indonesian patriotism and national hopes for a true republic. For these commentators (many rather elderly then, like my Batak language teachers), the Indonesian national project seemed to have been placed on hold while the New Order state sucked the island of Sumatra dry of its once-abundant resources. Some even said that New Order hegemony in Sumatra was a contemporary form of colonialism, one that was repeating some of the worst aspects of Dutch control of the Indies, if with more irony this time. Other Sipirok residents just kept quiet and tried to endure New Order times. This political climate shaped the way I was taught the Angkola Batak language by my elderly mentors, who were leery of New Order plans and platitudes.

This setting also influenced Sipirok residents' comments to me about languages in general, about language ways in the remembered colonial Indies, and about language matters under the New Order. Talk about language issues was a favorite topic in Sipirok, I found. Language ideologies were shaped and expressed through much deliberate popular commentary on speech ways in the colonial Indies era; at issue, also, were relationships between languages and the relative prestige of different

[3] Good sources on the press, art, literature, and performance in New Order times include David T. Hill, *The Press in New Order Indonesia* (Jakarta: Equinox Publishing, 2006); Virginia Matheson Hooker, ed., *Culture and Society in New Order Indonesia* (New York, NY, and London: Oxford University Press, 1996); Anna Greta Nilsson Hoadley, *Indonesian Literature vs. New Order Orthodoxy: The Aftermath of 1965–1966* (Copenhagen: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies, 2005); and Jorgen Hellman, *Performing the Nation: Cultural Politics in New Order Indonesia* (Copenhagen: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies, 2002). On language politics in the New Order, see especially James T. Siegel, *Solo in the New Order: Language and Hierarchy in an Indonesian City* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993).

languages on the national Indonesian stage.[4] My Batak language teachers were among the most voluble on these subjects in informal talks with me.

South Tapanuli was and is a sub-province of Indonesia located far from the centers of national power in Jakarta and Java. The several Batak peoples living in South and also North Tapanuli, in the impoverished uplands, were "minority peoples." At least, this was the national state's view. As perceived by the New Order regime, the southern Batak were untrustworthy mountain populations, living far from the purportedly more civilized Javanese, whose sheer numbers far outstripped those of Sumatran "minority" populations. The Angkola Batak were, supposedly, rustics and upriver peoples, counterposed to the more cosmopolitan sophisticates like the Javanese. The latter lived in old Indic state centers and had palace-based cultures harking back to Hindu-Buddhist times. Batak schoolchildren learned about their illustrious betters in their textbooks, in the compulsory public schools.

This perception of the supposedly inferior Batak and superior Javanese had a language dimension, as did much of South Tapanuli life. In Sipirok in the 1970s, instruction in the first three grades of elementary school was carried out in the Angkola Batak language. For those early years, pupils studied Indonesian—Bahasa Indonesia—as a special subject in school. Then, after third grade, this language arrangement was flipped, and the national language became the main means of instruction. For the youngsters, Angkola Batak then slid down their schoolhouse's linguistic prestige hierarchy to the status of a special, somewhat quaint elective. Given this way of presenting the two languages as students progressed into the upper grades, Batak schoolchildren in Sipirok were led to believe that Indonesian was the language of adulthood, further education, and career hopes, while Angkola Batak was the language of childhood and family intimacy. My Batak teachers begged to differ with this characterization—for them, Angkola Batak was as contemporary, relevant, and intellectually sophisticated as Indonesian was or could ever be. It should be noted that they were excellent Indonesian speakers themselves and old-line believers in the promise of a free Indonesian republic, with Bahasa Indonesia as its national language. They simply did not accede to the New Order's language ideology dictates, which privileged Indonesian over more "traditional," so-called ethnic languages like Batak (in any of its dialects—Angkola, Mandailing, Toba, Pakpak-Dairi, Karo, or Simelungun).

[4] For strong essays on the politics of language ideologies in different societies, see Richard Bauman and Charles Briggs, eds., *Voices of Modernity: Language Ideology and the Politics of Inequality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, Studies in Social and Cultural Foundations of Language, 2003); and Paul Kroskrity, Susan Gal, et al., *Regimes of Language: Ideologies, Polities, and Identities*, School of American Research Advanced Seminar Series (Santa Fe, NM: SAR Press, 2000). General essays on language ideologies are available in Bambi B. Schieffelin, Kathryn Woolard, and Paul Kroskrity, eds., *Language Ideology: Practice and Theory*, Oxford Studies in Anthropological Linguistics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998). Essays in Benedict R. O'G. Anderson's *Language and Power: Exploring Political Cultures in Indonesia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press) are rewarding as background here; for an anthropological monograph on the politics of language in an Indonesian society in New Order times, see Joel C. Kuipers, *Language, Identity, and Marginality in Indonesia*, Studies in Social and Cultural Foundations of Language (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998). Joseph Errington's *Linguistics in a Colonial World: A Story of Language, Meaning, and Power* (Malden, MA and Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2007) offers a sharp intellectual history of linguistic scholarship in the Indies, important here since so many language categories used in national-era Indonesia have ties to Dutch scholarship.

One of the several rural, "ancestral" regions of the Batak peoples in highland Sumatra, South Tapanuli was the home area of the Angkola Batak and Mandailing Batak societies.[5] The Batak dialects of these societies are quite similar, as are their kinship systems. These kinship systems foster passionate clan loyalties within the patrilineal clans, or *marga*, and encourage strategic marriage alliances between lineage segments of different clans. The Sipirok region in Tapsel (Tapanuli Selatan, South Tapanuli, a New Order acronym of the sort of which the regime was inordinately fond) was a proud place of vibrant Batak allegiances. But, it was also a locale that many upwardly striving younger Batak left, as they sought more glittery, better paid émigré lives in big Indonesian cities like Medan, Yogyakarta, or Jakarta itself.

To a degree, Sipirok residents associated Indonesia as a nation and Bahasa Indonesia as the national language with the lands "out there," beyond the ethnic home area. People in the Tapsel highland towns and the rice and coffee farming villages nearby found themselves typecast by some city kin as unsophisticated people mired in the past. Some Sipirok residents acceded to this idea. This was an ideology of societal self-denigration that has been in place since at least the 1890s.[6] Again, my Batak language teachers begged to differ with this interpretation. They saw the moral life—and linguistic excellence—to center around mountain regions like Sipirok. They often told me that they were proud that their one town could boast magnificent ritual oratory registers, splendid old chanted epics, and a sophisticated print literature that traced its origins back well into the mid-1800s. Sipirok was the home region for the important, if little-known, Indies-era Batak language novelists M. J. Soetan Hasoendoetan and Sutan Pangurabaan; the town could also boast the Indonesian-language literary stars Armijn Pane and Merari Siregar, novelists and literary theorists.[7] Given all this, Why apologize? my teachers contended.

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[5] Whether Mandailing people are Batak or not has long been a contentious issue for the people of Mandailing and others. In early migrations to the Deli coast for work on tobacco plantations during the colonial period, some Mandailing dropped their diagnostically Batak clan names (for instance, Lubis, Nasution, Batubara) in order to pass as east coast Sumatran Malays. People in Sipirok and in wider Angkola (Angkola Jae, Angkola Julu) are generally more comfortable with the Batak designation, but many Muslim residents of this area do draw a sharp distinction between themselves and the mostly Christian Toba Batak.

[6] Many articles in the Angkola Batak newspaper *Poestaha* (Padangsimpuan and Sibolga) in the 1920s deal with "what is wrong with the Batak societies." A similar set of themes emerged in some of the work of pioneering Mandailing schoolman Willem Iskander; for a discussion of this and sample translated texts, see Susan Rodgers, "Compromise and Contestation in Colonial Sumatra: An 1873 Mandailing Schoolbook on the 'Wonders of the West,'" in *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* (*BKI*) 158,3 (2002): 479–512.

[7] M. J. Soetan Hasoendoetan (from a village near Sipirok) was a poet, novelist, and folklorist active in the 1920s through the early 1940s in Batak-language publishing circles in Tapanuli and Pematang Siantar. See the introduction to my English translation of his 1927–29 Angkola Batak-language novel, *Sitti Djaoerah*, for background on his career and his use of Sipirok's ritual speech registers in his written work. See Susan Rodgers, *Sitti Djaoerah: A Novel of Colonial Indonesia* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin-Madison Center for Southeast Asian Studies, 1997), pp. 3–51. For an analysis of Soetan Hasoendoetan's imageries of time in a political context, see my "Imagining Tradition, Imagining Modernity: A Southern Batak Novel from the 1920s," *BKI* 147,2–3: 273–97. My translation of Soetan Hasoendoetan's 1941 printed version of the Sipirok epic chant "Datuk Tuongku Tuan Malim Leman" is available in Susan Rodgers, *Print, Poetics, and Politics: A Sumatran Epic in the Colonial Indies and New Order Indonesia* (Leiden: KITLV Press, 2005); see also the Introduction there for a discussion of Soetan Hasoendoetan's print visions of Sipirok oratory and how *turi-turian* chants and their print versions fared under the Soeharto regime. Sutan Pangurabaan Pane, a school principal, newspaper editor, novelist, and prolific writer of political pamphlets, was also active in Angkola Batak literary circles in late colonial times. He came from a village right outside Sipirok,

Soon after I arrived in Sipirok in July 1974 (a surprise to many there, for wasn't I going backwards, to come to rather than immigrate out of the town as a twenty-five year old?), I told new acquaintances that I would be staying in Sipirok for about six months to study the Angkola Batak language. I wanted to learn the language so that I could then (predictably enough) move away from this small settlement in the highlands down to the city of Medan, about twelve hours distant by bus, to do my dissertation research on interethnic relations there.

Medan was and is a polyglot, ethnically mixed sort of place, a big, chaotic, on-the-make city that has long acted as a magnet for immigrants from various Indonesian societies from both Sumatra and Java. With Toba Batak, Karo Batak, Simelungun Batak, Angkola and Mandailing Batak, Acehnese, Minangkabau, Niassians, Indonesian Chinese, and even Javanese in residence in Medan in large numbers, the city would be the perfect locale (I told myself, not to mention granting agencies) for exploring ethnic identity construction in urban Indonesia. I had fellowship support for an eighteen-month stay in Indonesia to study just this topic. I was going to explore the interethnic conversations and social transactions that took place in Medan for traces of Batak identity construction and (I suspected) continual reformulation. My residence in Sipirok was to be brief, and, admittedly, instrumental: just an interlude for studying the Angkola Batak language before turning toward Medan and my "real work."

To investigate ethnic relations in Medan with some social nuance, I figured I needed to speak an "ethnic language" like Angkola Batak, as well as the national language, Bahasa Indonesia. Medan residents were often bilingual, fluent in a language of family heritage, like Angkola Batak, and also—"of course"—in Indonesian (which virtually everyone in the city knew). So, it made sense for me to aim for bilingualism, too, so that I could code-switch between the two languages as my conversational partners did. Bahasa Indonesia and the Batak languages are closely related tongues within the large Western Austronesian language family, but they are not mutually intelligible. They shared loan words from Indonesian, some vocabulary, such as the words for numbers, a common phonetic system, and many grammatical patterns. But, a monolingual Indonesian speaker overhearing a long conversation in Angkola Batak would not understand very much at all. I knew I would need to find one or more instructors who were native speakers to teach me Angkola Batak.

Six months of study: that struck me as about right. Try thirty-seven years, I say to myself now, writing this and realizing the language's depths. But in 1974 I thought that six months of Batak language study and then twelve months of city research on my topic was just the ticket.

Pangurabaan. He was the author of the Angkola Batak-language novel *Tolbok Haleon*, which first appeared in the newspaper *Poestaha* in 1916. In a forthcoming article entitled "Sutan Pangurabaan Rewrites Sumatran Language Landscapes: The Political Possibilities of Commercial Print in the Late Colonial Indies" (in press, *BKI* 168,1 [April 2012]), I discuss this protean author's work. Sutan Pangurabaan was the father of Armijn Pane and Sanusi Pane, important Indonesian language writers in the creation of a national literature. While their father wrote in both Angkola Batak and in Indonesian, Armijn and Sanusi used Indonesian. Armijn Pane's novel *Belenggu* (Jakarta: Pustaka Rakyat, 1949) is often considered the first self-consciously "modern" novel in Indonesian. Merari Siregar was from a noble family in the village of Bungabondar, several kilometers outside Sipirok. His Indonesian-language novel *Azab dan Sengsara: Kisah Kehidupan Seorang Anak Gadis* (Jakarta: Balai Pustaka, 1927) concerns young people constrained by village marriage alliance rules; the novel is set in the Sipirok area.

I had begun my stay in Indonesia with a frustrating week in Jakarta to check in with national bureaucracies to pick up my research clearance papers and to get each of these documents suitably decorated with official New Order government stamps. Two days after I arrived in the capital (to stay with a Toba family, something I could not admit later to new Angkola friends), I came down with the flu. It was a bone-aching version; I had to drag myself around from office to office. Once I got to Medan, somewhat recovered but still weak, more government office check-ins ensued. I also visited the teachers' college in this Sumatran metropolis, the IKIP–Medan.[8] I had been advised by graduate school mentors back in the United States that IKIP faculty might be able to help me find a Batak language teacher. Sure enough, several Batak on the faculty warmed to the task.

The dean was a Toba Batak who tried to convince me to study his dialect (the best of the dialects, I was told—I was to encounter many Toba/Angkola tiffs in the following years in Tapanuli). The dean advised me to concentrate my dissertation work on his people and suggested I live with his mother in her home in Balige, in North Tapanuli, while studying. I begged off, telling him that I had already decided to concentrate on Angkola, since that region and population had a religious mixture (90 percent Muslim, 10 percent Protestant Christian) that was interesting to me. Toba was almost entirely Christian, and Mandailing was fully Muslim. The dean, a Christian, looked askance at me.

Committed to focusing on Angkola, I asked new IKIP–Medan acquaintances how I should go about learning Angkola Batak. The answer was swift: the mountain town of Sipirok was *definitely* the place to study the Angkola Batak language, *hata Angkola*. My consultants averred that I should get as far away as possible from Medan if I wanted to study the "genuine, authentic, original" (that is, *asli*) Angkola Batak language. Medan language use is always mixed and tossed together like a *gado-gado* vegetable-and-peanut-sauce salad, they said, with disapproval. Indonesian and Minangkabau and Acehnese and too many Batak dialects to count all got tumbled together in the city, my advisors went on. This would be a disaster for an anthropologist (they continued), who surely would want to study a clear-cut culture (a *budaya*) with a distinct, identifiable language. Sipirok's *hata Angkola* (they told me) was pure and unadulterated—*asli*, in a word (an Indonesian word, as it happened).

I doubted this vision of linguistic virginity, for language landscapes in Indonesia are almost always intertextual and intertwined, as they have been for decades. But, scenic and cool Sipirok up in the mountains promised to beat hot, humid, hectic Medan for me, so I took my IKIP mentors' advice. A middle-aged IKIP education professor from Sibadoar Village near Sipirok, M. S. Siregar, was delegated by his Toba Batak dean to escort me to Sipirok. We were to take the 8 AM-to-8 PM Sibualbuali Bus Company ride to the little town. Bapak M. S.'s wife gave me a sarong—always handy to have, she noted, in a conservative village like Sibadoar, where women should wear sarongs and not skirts (like mine).

Furious consultations among Sipirok émigré families in Medan about my projected work had preceded this (truly awful) bus trip. Mention of nauseated four year olds and

[8] IKIP is an acronym for Institut Keguruan dan Ilmu Pendidikan, Institute for Teaching and Pedagogy. The IKIPs are the state teacher-training colleges in Indonesia.

balky gear shifts only begin to tell that tale. Before M. S. Siregar and I left on our trip, my new research advisors in Medan had chosen an Angkola Batak language teacher for me in Sipirok: Bapak G. W. Siregar, a seventy-six-year-old, Christian, retired middle-school teacher. He was from an old-line hereditary noble family in town, the Bagas Lombang Siregars. His father had also been a schoolteacher in the mission schools of the HKBP church (the Huria Kristen Batak Protestant, set up by the German Rhenish Mission in the mid-1800s). Bapak G. W.'s brother and two sisters had also been teachers, first in the Dutch colonial-era schools in Tapanuli and then in the national public schools.

Bapak G. W., 1976, photo by Arlen Jansen, reprinted with permission

Pretty much without consulting me, my Medan mentors had also helpfully found a place for me to live in Sipirok: a house right next door to Bapak G. W.'s house, in Kampung Tinggi. This was a quiet neighborhood of teachers, civil servants, and a few business people. I was to live with sixty-one-year-old Ompu Elpi, yet another Christian retired schoolteacher and the mother of eleven. All of them, grown up now, were spectacular émigré success stories living off in the cities outside Tapanuli (that is, in the *rantau*, the regions beyond the home areas). Parenting such a brood toward academic degrees and gainful employment left Ompu Elpi with a sterling reputation in Sipirok and Medan and several empty bedrooms in her big wooden plank house in the mountain town. It was a spacious structure set up on concrete piles with a concrete front stoop and glass windows—signs of high social status. Ompu Elpi and her late

husband, Guru Gabriel (like her, another hereditary aristocrat and, in his case, a middle-school principal), had built the home in the early years of World War II, when the Japanese forces occupied the Indies. They had come back home to Sipirok in those unsettled, dangerous years after Guru Gabriel lost his job in the Dutch-run colonial school system in Padang, West Sumatra. Ompu Elpi and Guru Gabriel financed the construction of their new house with the proceeds of the sale of Ompu Elpi's bridal gold jewelry. They had lost their cash savings when the Dutch banks that they had trusted with Guru Gabriel's salary collapsed in Padang, when the Japanese invaded in 1942.

It had been decided then, back in Medan in 1974: since Ompu Elpi had lots of room now that her children had all left Sipirok, I could stay with her. I would pay monthly room and board and would live in her home in Kampung Tinggi for my six months of language study. We would share meals, and I would study Angkola Batak with our elderly next-door neighbor. While still in Medan, I had had the fleeting, silly idea that I might have some significant say in setting up these arrangements, but that only showed how little I knew about dealing with southern Batak retired schoolteachers and their almost equally forceful city kin. Fortunately, I kept my mouth shut in the face of these fiats and simply tried to survive the long bus ride to my new home. At least, I was fully recovered from my Jakarta influenza by this point.

Both Bapak G. W. and Ompu Elpi became my Batak language teachers, with Bapak G. W. taking the primary role in my formal lessons and Ompu Elpi teaching me in much more indirect ways as my conversational partner at home. They remained my teachers for the entire two and a half years that I ended up staying in Sipirok, not studying urban ethnic relations in Medan at all but settling down in town to learn about Sipirok's ritual speech registers in the Angkola Batak language. I ended up writing my dissertation on that, *pace* granting agencies and their generous funding for my erstwhile urban ethnicity project. My dissertation concerned the ways that "the modern" was portrayed in Angkola Batak-language ritual speech forms, such as the orations given at night-long buffalo sacrifice feasts called *horja*.[9]

By the end of that first month in Sipirok, my instructors had set to the challenging task of teaching the visiting American graduate student to speak and understand *hata Angkola*. By August, I was launched into a five-day-a-week regimen of 7:30 AM-to-12 noon rapid-fire language lessons with Bapak G. W. He turned out to be a taskmaster. I had to do homework practice drills all afternoon, and then, after a dinner with Ompu Elpi (piping hot red rice, fried fresh tuna curry, boiled cassava leaves), I did an hour or so more of memorization drills. I was working incredibly hard. In fact, my head was spinning, as I had not experienced Batak old-time schoolteacher boot camp before. I certainly was learning Batak, though, if by force. Oddly, I was enjoying myself a good deal and was coming to relish my time with Bapak G. W. in the mornings and Ompu Elpi in the evenings.

[9] Susan Rodgers, "Angkola Batak Kinship through its Oral Literature" (PhD dissertation, University of Chicago, 1978).

Language Politics in Sipirok: Language Lesson Contexts

Sipirok is an emphatically bilingual town. Everyone there in the 1970s spoke Angkola Batak, except for members of a few of the police families who had moved there from other parts of Indonesia. The few Toba Batak in town (knowing what was good for them) had switched from their Batak dialects over to Angkola. This was a relatively easy transition that involved changing some vocabulary and shifting accent a bit. The even less numerous Indonesian-Chinese in Sipirok also used Angkola Batak as their everyday language. And, everyone over the age of seven or so spoke fluent Indonesian as well. Most had learned it in school, as mentioned. Malay (now Indonesian) has been used in this area of Sumatra as a trader's lingua franca for many years. The Dutch colonial school system's policy of privileging Malay over the Batak languages for middle-school instruction and beyond by the 1930s further solidified the common use of Malay in Tapanuli. A few of the old-school, Dutch-trained teachers such as Bapak G. W. and Ompu Elpi also spoke Dutch, although they rarely used that language, this long after the national revolution. Younger Sipirok residents often had a mania for studying English. Few knew the language well, however. Even the town's high-school English teachers suffered from a stodgy pedagogical approach that emphasized rote memorization of arcane rules of grammar over oral fluency. Thus, a common salutation hurled at me by teenagers as I walked through town to shop for soap, candles, or matches: "Hello Mister!" At least that beat their younger siblings' frequent way of calling out to me as I walked along: "Belanda!!" (Dutch person, with a pejorative tone). This left me nonplussed.

Upon arriving in Sipirok I was fairly fluent in Indonesian, due to a well-taught intensive summer 1973 course at the University of Wisconsin at the national summer studies institute on the language, and then two semesters of Bahasa Indonesia courses at Cornell (two per term) during the following academic year. With my John Echols and Hassan Shadily Indonesian–English dictionary in hand,[10] I could read simple passages from Indonesian-language books and, with lots of time, I could make my way through the Indonesian-language Medan newspapers (these came to Sipirok on that same Sibualbuali bus each day). But, I knew no Batak at all when I first got to Sipirok. Such was their pride in their home language of Angkola Batak that my Sipirok mentors in their sixties and seventies seemed to see their 1974 and 1975 language lessons with me as an effort of cultural and moral rescue. I was being "improved," rescued from my lamentable status as a person who could "only" speak the national tongue. Bapak G. W. and Ompu Elpi relished speaking good Indonesian, and they surely knew that that language was a key factor in their families' success in the *rantau*. But, Batak was better, they held, for it was finer, subtler, more mellifluous than Bahasa Indonesia—a lovely medium that allowed one to say so much more than Indonesian did. Despite Bahasa Indonesia's undeniable practical uses as the national tongue and its pre-New Order associations with the promise of a free Indonesian nation, they championed Angkola Batak.

My teachers seemed to have no negative impression at all of Sipirok as a backwater and South Tapanuli as a "left behind" region that sensible people inevitably matured

[10] John Echols and Hassan Shadily, *An Indonesian–English Dictionary* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, second edition, 1963).

out of. Rather, they saw Sipirok as the heartland of an excellent old Batak civilization of refinement and social grace. And, they saw the Angkola Batak language spoken in Sipirok as one of Sumatra's (and Indonesia's, and the world's) glories. They also laughed at my idea that I could master *hata Angkola* in six months. My naive confidence held a certain charm for them.

Their pride in *hata Angkola* was firm and deep, but a bit anxious nonetheless, for they knew that younger South Tapanuli Batak and many city émigrés were turning toward Bahasa Indonesia as their primary language of daily conversation and worklife. Angkola Batak was in little danger of disappearing, at least in rural Tapanuli. The Batak populations are large and the various Batak dialects are often used at home, even after rural children begin to learn Indonesian in the public schools. But, even in Sipirok, a self-consciously traditional sort of place, Angkola Batak's more esoteric upper reaches of ritual speech registers were known to fewer and fewer young people over time. The rhymed courtship *martandang* repartee, the *andung* lament speech, the *osong-osong* verbal duels between marriage alliance partners, the special language for gathering camphor from the spirit trees—all of these and other genres of special speech were slipping from public memory.[11] They had been receding from use, in fact, since at least the 1910s, as Sipirok society turned increasingly toward Indies cosmopolitanism.

In 1974, decades later, South Tapanuli was becoming an increasingly inextricable part of the New Order state, and Bahasa Indonesia was establishing itself as the hegemonic language of that state. It should be emphasized again: Bapak G. W. and Ompu Elpi took pride in the especially elegant version of the national language that was spoken in the South Tapanuli towns. After all, they often reminded me, Bahasa Indonesia—originally Malay—came from Sumatra, from the region around Palembang in the south. Still, they saw the relationship between Angkola Batak and Bahasa Indonesia as poignantly competitive, and worrisome.

From July 1974 through all of 1975, my Sipirok language teachers taught me much about the politics of these language dynamics as we worked together to rescue me from my confinement to "just Indonesian." Throughout this period, I kept fieldnotes and recorded the details of all of my language lessons with care. After Bapak G. W. decided that I needed to study the oratory registers as well as conversational Angkola Batak, I tape-recorded some of my later work with Angkola Batak-language ritual speechmakers. My dreams of urban ethnicity research were long gone by this point; Ompu Elpi's hospitality and those tuna curries had also softened my will to stick to those original plans.

Drawing on such materials and on my memories of that time (now that I have been a college professor in the United States for years), this essay is an exploratory account of some of my experiences in language learning during my first year and a half in Sipirok, as my Batak teachers sought to pull me away from my reliance on Bahasa Indonesia and induct me into Angkola Batak language landscapes of astounding allure and beauty.

[11] My "Folklore with a Vengeance: A Sumatran Literature of Resistance in the Colonial Indies and New Order Indonesia" explores some of the ways that special speech registers were wielded in print for political reasons, in these two eras. See Susan Rodgers, "Folklore with a Vengeance," *Journal of American Folklore* 116,460 (2003): 129–59.

In drilling me in and into their elegant, elusive *hata*, they were also skewering the very notion that Angkola Batak was a beleaguered "minority society language." As I learned Angkola Batak, to some degree, in those years, I also learned small, quotidian lessons about language and power in the wider New Order. This essay recalls a few of those insights, through a close account of some of the daily work that Bapak G. W. and I did in our early Angkola Batak language lessons together. We held our sessions in Ompu Elpi's front room. I would sit at her wide hardwood dining table, pens and lined school notebook paper at hand (aged twenty-five, but posed as a ten year old). Bapak G. W. would preside over our studies, attired in the nationalist *peci* black cap, creased gray trousers, and a starched white long shirt. He would stand in front of his portable chalk board, epitomizing the complete Batak, Dutch-trained schoolmaster that he was. A 1918 graduate of the Kweekschool Bukittinggi (the famous raja's school for the Sumatran elite), Bapak G. W. had spent his twenties and thirties teaching in Sipirok's Dutch-language Hollandsch Inlandsche School, the town's HIS. In fact, he taught Ompu Elpi there when she was a small girl; her father had been the first Angkola man ordained by the mission church in the southern highlands, and he insisted on an excellent education for his children. Ompu Elpi had been a favorite, her father's youngest child with his first wife (who died when Ompu Elpi was two years old).

Following his HIS service in Sipirok and his marriage to a young village woman from the Lubis clan, Bapak G. W. taught in a teacher-training school in the Karo Batak area in the late 1930s. This was in the town of Kabanjahe, where he spoke Karo Batak. After that, and on until the Japanese occupation of 1942–45, Bapak G. W., his wife, Ompu Christi, and their son, Wilmar, lived on the island of Nias, where Bapak G. W. was the chief school inspector for the government-run elementary schools. He spoke Niassian with the children and school personnel, and Indonesian and Dutch to those few on Nias who knew such languages. Then, like Ompu Elpi's family, Bapak G. W.'s household retreated to the relative safety of the Sipirok area during the war and remained there through the 1945–49 national revolution. They lived in Sibadoar Village, to which Bapak G. W.'s father had retired after a final school assignment there. After 1949, Bapak G. W. taught the Batak language and Batak literature in the middle school down the lane in Kampung Tinggi, in the new national public schools. Guru Gabriel (another Kweekschool Bukittinggi graduate) was this school's principal. With Bapak G. W. as my instructor, I was getting an experienced language teacher, not to mention association with a stellar language learner. I was also gaining ready access to the circles of old hereditary nobles who still practiced the ritual speech forms. And, I was gaining mentors who applauded such endeavors as graduate study. I was being molded to take part in scholarship as they understood it.

Language Lesson Memoirs

Language learning memoirs like this one are rare in anthropology. My guideposts in writing this essay include serious popular press memoirs of learning a new language[12] and the anthropological literature on self-reflexive fieldwork accounts.[13]

[12] A recent example is the journalist Katherine Russell Rich's *Dreaming in Hindi: Coming Awake in Another Language* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2009). Also rewarding are language learning memoirs

There is Robbins Burling's practical-minded and certainly useful *Learning a Field Language*,[14] but this is largely a how-to guidebook that an ethnographer is expected to read before the fact, to plan out a language learning strategy for a language he or she cannot study or read about before departing for fieldwork. Burling writes to his intended reader,[15]

> ... I will assume that you are more interested in language as a tool for communication than as an object to be investigated in its own right. I will assume that you will want to use the language in order to speak about all sorts of practical matters, but that you will have no special or technical reason to explore its abstract structure. I will also assume that you will have few books either about, or in, the language that you want to learn. I will assume that you won't have grammatical descriptions and that you won't have dictionaries.

My situation in trying to learn Angkola Batak with Indonesian as my medium of instruction with my accomplished and deeply literate Sipirok language teachers could hardly have been more different from this.

Formal study of Indonesian before departure for fieldwork in that country is the norm for anthropologists; many grammars exist. The Batak dialects themselves have been extensively studied by linguists. In fact, Toba Batak was the subject of one of the earliest, and best, descriptive grammars, H. N. Van Der Tuuk's monumental 1864–67 *Tobasche Spraakunst*.[16] I had the English translation of this in Sipirok with me and had reviewed it before I left the United States to see how Batak's linguistic patterns related to those I was familiar with from my study of Indonesian. Angkola Batak also has a large, sophisticated, self-reflexive print literature available in the Latin alphabet dating

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by academics. See Eva Hoffman, *Lost in Translation: A Life in a New Language* (New York, NY, and London: Penguin, 1990); and Alice Kaplan, *French Lessons: A Memoir* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1993). A classic memoir recalling a troubled bilingual youth is Richard Rodriguez's *Hunger of Memory: The Education of Richard Rodriguez* (New York, NY: Bantam Books, 1982). Batak print literature itself is also rich in this genre; see P. Pospos, *Aku dan Toba*, a childhood memoir that deals with a Toba boy's remembered struggles navigating Toba Batak, Malay, and Dutch in 1920s Tapanuli (Jakarta: Balai Pustaka, 1950). Susan Rodgers, *Telling Lives, Telling History: Autobiography and Historical Imagination in Modern Indonesia* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1995) includes an English translation of *Aku dan Toba* and a discussion of childhood multilingual dilemmas (pp. 53–60).

[13] Entrée ways into this large literature include Judith Okely and Helen Callaway, eds., *Anthropology and Autobiography*, ASA Monographs 29 (London and New York, NY: Routledge, 1992); Judith Okely, "Anthropology and Autobiography: Participatory Experience and Embodied Knowledge," in Okely and Callaway, eds., *Anthropology and Autobiography*, pp. 1–28. See also Vincent Crapanzano, *Tuhami: Portrait of a Moroccan* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1980); and Paul Stoller and Cheryl Olkes, *In Sorcery's Shadow: A Memoir of Apprenticeship among the Songhay of Niger* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1989). Claude Levi-Strauss's *Tristes Tropiques* is foundational here (Paris: Plon, 1955). As context, see James Clifford and George E. Marcus, eds., *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1986). Valuable feminist critiques of that 1986 anthology are available in Ruth Behar and Deborah A. Gordon, eds., *Women Writing Culture* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1995). That work builds on Ruth Behar's *Translated Woman: Crossing the Border with Esperanza's Story* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1993).

[14] Robbins Burling, *Learning a Field Language* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1984).

[15] Ibid., p. 1.

[16] H. N. Van der Tuuk, *A Grammar of Toba Batak*, trans. Jeane Scott-Kimball, KITLV translation series 13 (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1971). The original is H. N. Van der Tuuk, *Tobasche Spraakunst* (Nederlandsch Bijbelgenootschap, 1864 and 1867).

back to the 1870s. This literature includes novels, journalism, folkloric versions of epics and other ritual speech forms, and also many excellent primers and reading anthologies for young school children.[17] Bapak G. W. and I made good use of the latter in our early lessons.

As far as I was able to determine, there were no formal, published lessons for learning Angkola Batak when I began my work with Bapak G. W. in 1974. We made up our own, as will soon be evident. Or rather, Bapak G. W. made up our lessons. I had thought that he might want to use one of my Indonesian language textbooks that I had brought from home as a template for some of our Batak lessons. I presented Bapak G. W. with a copy of John Wolff's *Beginning Indonesian, Book 1*,[18] when we first met, in fact. This had been my textbook back in the United States. He took the book home for a night to take a look and then brushed off my suggestion the next morning. Bapak G. W. was kind but firm in this. He had our curriculum well in hand, and I received an early lesson in proper pupil deportment: always defer to one's teacher. Bapak G. W. chose to conceptualize his own language lessons for me rather than follow the Wolff textbook closely.

Several additional genres of literature have been helpful to me as I put my 1974–75 fieldnotes and language lesson records into an order that allows me to narrate their associated social worlds. The first is a language-focused ethnography by anthropologist Gary Witherspoon, his continually rewarding *Language and Art in the Navajo Universe*.[19] Witherspoon gives readers a doorway to Navajo visions of time, beauty, and human agency by paying close attention to Navajo words, phrases, sentences, and grammatical patterns gleaned from his fieldwork. Drawing on Witherspoon's example in narrating my work with Bapak G. W. in our lessons and early conversations, I have tried to avoid over-translation and over-Englishification of Batak words and phrases. I have also eschewed too much reliance on easy equivalencies between Batak words and grammatical patterns and Indonesian ones. Too-rapid translation of *hata Angkola* passages, or, indeed, structural patterns into Indonesian phrases and patterns, is often politically fraught, as my work with Sipirok teachers showed me.

Another important text for me in this context is linguist Bob Dixon's *Searching for Aboriginal Languages: Memoirs of a Fieldworker*.[20] The resonance of this wonderful book is surprising to me because Dixon is a linguist whose research focuses on matters quite distant from anthropology's aim of studying cultural worlds. As a graduate student in linguistics in 1963, Dixon left the United Kingdom for North Queensland, Australia, to do fieldwork in anticipation of writing the first formal grammar of the Jirrbal dialect of Dyirbal, an indigenous Australian language. His goal was to describe that language in

[17] The introduction to my *Print, Poetics, and Politics* gives an overview of some of this literature. Among the most famous southern Batak schoolbooks in Batak are Willem Iskandar's *SiBulus-Bulus SiRumbuk-Rumbuk* (Batavia: Landsdrukkerij, 1872) and Sutan Martua Raja's *Dua Sadjoli* and *Rante Omas* (Batavia: Landsdrukkerij, 1917–1919), also published by the colonial school authorities.

[18] John U. Wolff, *Beginning Indonesian through Self-Instruction, Book 1* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Southeast Asia Program Publications, 1971).

[19] Gary Witherspoon, *Language and Art in the Navajo Universe* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1977).

[20] Bob Dixon, *Searching for Aboriginal Languages: Memoirs of a Fieldworker* (St. Lucia, London, New York, NY: University of Queensland Press, 1983).

abstract terms for later comparative analysis, not to learn to speak Dyirbal to study Jirrbal politics or any other topic of that sort. He "wanted a language of [his] own—some interesting and complicated tongue that was in need of study"[21] and in need of a descriptive grammar. He writes that he had no concrete plan for how actually to do fieldwork on this challenging language when he arrived in north Australia.

Linguistic research of this sort directed toward producing a formal grammar sometimes involves rather brief field study. Yet, from 1963 to 1977 Dixon developed into a superb, dogged, patient, open-minded fieldworker in Dyirbal and the even more complex language Yidiny. Dixon's memoir of doing this linguistic fieldwork revolves around much more than just techniques on how to collect vocabulary lists and materials on case, gender, and tense—he lets these languages come alive on the English-language page in step-by-step fashion as the reader moves through the fieldwork memoir. He expects his reader to work hard in trying to grasp concepts and structural points about these decidedly non-Western languages. Dixon also consistently sticks close to indigenous Australian language phraseology; he intersplices his account with tales and myths from remembered conversations; he ties his memoir to concrete, lived relationships with his Dyirbal and Yidiny field assistants. Dixon's powerful narrative lets the English-language reader inhabit parts of these indigenous Australian language worlds—a goal for me, too, in writing about learning *hata Angkola* in the 1970s.

Finally, as must be clear already from the prologue, I draw on anthropologist John Pemberton's dialogically ethnographic and historical *On the Subject of "Java."*[22] This study pinpoints the socially constructed nature of such ideas as "Java," "Javanese culture," and "culture" itself, both in Indonesia (in the Dutch colonial period and in New Order times as well) and in anthropology. Pemberton warns against assuming that the "cultures" that anthropologists of Indonesia typically seek in their fieldwork have any realness separate from political discourse in places and times like colonial-era Surakarta, New Order Solo, or, indeed, any period from the anthropologist's home society and academic milieu. Pemberton counsels anthropologists to be especially wary of New Order governmental reifications of ancient "*tradisi*," traditions (of the ethnic peoplehood variety). In Surakarta/Solo, Soeharto government pronouncements concerning *tradisi* (purportedly to help "preserve" worthy traditions) acted, in effect, as carefully obscured means of state control ... or, at least, of attempted state control. People in Solo had visions of their own. In TapSel, in the 1970s, the situation was similar. The "Angkola Batak language" and "Angkola Batak culture" were presented in the public schools and government publishing campaigns as quaint icons of a minority people still lamentably tied to the past. Skeptics like my circle of retired schoolteacher friends pushed back with subtle counter-visions. And, as I moved more deeply into my language lessons with Bapak G. W., I became conscious of how much our own biographied selves were constructing the language that I was learning and that he was teaching. Pemberton's work helps give theoretical clarity here, points I shall return to in the conclusion. We can turn now to some of my early lessons with Bapak G. W.

[21] Ibid., p. 5.

[22] Pemberton, *On the Subject of "Java."*

First Steps in Lesson One

In July 1974, with me as the pliant pupil and Bapak G. W. in full feather as the HIS-trained *guru lama*, we began. Lesson One gave me some phrases expressing action to say and confirmed that at least part of Angkola Batak resembled Bahasa Indonesia in verb structure and also word order. Bapak G. W. wrote on his portable chalkboard:

Kehe tu pasar.
Mardalan tu sikola.
Marlojong tu saba.

He told me the Indonesian versions and things seemed simple so far:

Pergi ke pasar. Go to the market.
Berjalan ke sekolah. Walk to school.
Berlari ke sawah. Run to the rice field.

All the sounds were the same as the ones in Indonesian, although, from just listening to people talk in town, I suspected there were going to be more initial *ng*'s in Angkola words than in Indonesian. In both languages, as I had already found out, if one wanted to mark the plural one could do it by doubling a noun (*pidong*, bird; *pidong-pidong*, birds). But, much more commonly, the plural would be evident from context, so the single form could be used. I also already knew that some Angkola words were similar to ones in Indonesian. For instance, Ompu Elpi had a cat, a scruffy miscreant named Si Huting ("Mr. Cat," where *Si* worked as a classifier for humans and some other living creatures or things like mountains. Sipirok's nearby volcano was called Sibualbuali, Si-Bubbler-Steamer). Indonesian also had a *Si* form, and cat was *kucing*.

Lesson One went on to build up my store of verb actions (in the moving-through-space sense) and also introduced me to the Angkola Batak numbers, one through twenty. These were extremely close to the respective Indonesian words for numbers, so they were not hard for me to memorize over the following afternoon: *sada, dua, tolu, opat, lima, onom, pitu, sabolas, sambilan* or sometimes *sia, sapulu, sabolas, duabolas, tolubolas, opatbolas, limabolas, onombolas, pitubolas, salapanbolas, sambilanbolas, duapulu*. These looked awfully much like near-direct loan words from Indonesian, but I did not comment on the resemblance.

Bapak G. W. was aware that I already knew some common names for children in town: Si Pantas (Appropriate-that-he-be-born), Si Ria (Happy), Si Johanes, Si Hamzah, and Si Nur (popular with Muslim families), and Si Martin (Luther). These soon came in handy as I tried to expand on the verb action statements, listed above. Bapak G. W. went on to write the Angkola pronouns on the board. "I" was *au*, quite similar to Indonesian's *aku*, the rather literary variant of the more standard *saya*. This situation helped me to understand why so many Sipirok people used *Aku* so much when speaking Indonesian as opposed to *saya*. And, as in Indonesian, Angkola Batak speakers tended to avoid saying the first-person singular pronoun if they possibly could. Indirectness was everything, stylistically speaking.

Second-person singular was *ho* in *hata Angkola*. In different phonetic contexts, I quickly discovered, the pronunciation of *ho* changes to *ko*. Bapak G. W. did not articulate this rule for me yet, and I could not figure it out at this point. Second-person

plural was *hamu*, which also was the form of "you" that denoted respect as one spoke to persons whose position on the social ladder was higher than one's own. My older schoolteacher friends tended to use rather formal variants of "you" when they spoke Indonesian. That is, they would say *engkau* or *'kau* for second-person singular and *kalian*, for the plural "you." This gave their Indonesian a courtly air, a style that I picked up after several months. Bapak G. W. and his friends nudged me away from using the slangier, more informal Indonesian that I had learned in some of John Wolff's lessons back home.

Polite discourse included a rule that speakers should avoid actually saying "you" to interlocutors, if at all possible, in the same way that Angkola proscribed the use of "I." Angkola speakers prided themselves in being *halus* (they used the Indonesian word): smooth, refined. A good daily demonstration of this refinement was to use the proper kin term of address in speaking directly to someone, as opposed to saying "you"—and surely as opposed to being so crass as actually to address someone by his or her first name. Sipirok people had given names, but they were mostly artifacts of early childhood. Bapak G. W.'s first name was Ginding, I found out some months later, but I would never have dreamed of using that in direct address. I was not even supposed to know his name. *Datu* sorcerer/spellcasters might misuse such information.

I could never address Bapak G. W. as *ho* this early in our friendship and professional association (way too forward). *Hamu* was also too blunt, even though it did add the extra shade of respect. When we spoke Angkola to each other, I was to call him *Amang*, which is the word for "father." He called me 'San (from Susan—etiquette rules got a bit bent sometimes), or *ho* or, more formally, *Inang*. This was one of my first *poda*, moral lessons, in using precise kin terms of address in Sipirok as a sign of being a finished and fully formed human being.

Inang is the word for "mother" in Angkola Batak, but Bapak G. W.'s use of it in addressing me shows a portion of the Angkola *martutur* universe beyond that one address form. *Martutur* was the verb that described one's effort to determine the appropriate kin term for one's interlocutor; often this effort would entail questions and answers at the start of a new acquaintance. In *tutur* (proper kin term use), sons and daughters both call *Amang* to their father. The father, however, calls *Amang* back to his son. This mutual and delicately respectful use of the same kin term of address showed up in many locales of *tutur* talk. That is, girls called their mothers *Inang* (the primary meaning of the word is "Mother"), but the mothers used that word right back in addressing their girls. Fathers also called their daughters *Inang*. These men would also address their mothers as *Inang*. And grandparents and grandchildren? The youngster called *Ompu* or *Ompung* to Grandmother and Grandfather, and the older persons called *Ompu* or *Ompung* right back to the child. A primary meaning of *Ompung* was "grandparent," or, more generally, "ancestor." One could also refer to a respected elder, fondly, as *Ompui* (the *i* here meant "that older person, there"). Another *Ompui*: Tiger in the Forest, the highly respected clan totem and ancestor of the Siregar clan descendants.

Children are allied with their grandparents as their eventual replacements in time and also as playful co-conspirators, over against the parental generation, situated in

between grandchildren and grandparents. *Ompung*s call each other that to show their closeness, but also to denote respect.

Things were to become more complex yet. Ompu Elpi and Ompu Christi (Bapak G. W.'s wife) were being called by teknonyms. Ompu Elpi had a first name, but that had receded from use soon after childhood for all but very close intimates, who had known her since she was a child. She was her "First Child's Mom" throughout most of her married adulthood (marriage is necessary for a person to achieve adult status). About ten years before 1974, though, her daughter Eme (another schoolteacher) and Eme's husband, Dr. Haris (an orthopedic surgeon), had their first child, a girl, named Elpina, or Elpi for short. Upon that birth, my landlady changed her name to the teknonym, "Elpi's Grandmother," Ompu Elpi. Ompu Christi did the same when Wilmar and his wife had their first child. Bapak G. W. could have taken on the same name, Ompu Christi, as well, but he stayed with either Bapak G. W. or Guru Ginding. The latter sobriquet was a public title, so the use of "Ginding" was allowed.

Amang, Inang, Ompung and many more *tutur* terms were also applied to Sipirok's vast range of classificatory kin for any Angkola person. Older men of one's father's generation in one's clan were called *Amang* upon first meeting. Once *martutur* was done, however, a more precise kin term could be determined (say, *Amantua*, father's older brother). Upon first meeting, older women of one's mother's clan were addressed as *Inang*, but after *martutur* a more precise term, such as *bujing*, should be used (mother's younger sister).

In early lessons with Bapak G. W., and in evening conversations with Ompu Elpi, I discovered that much Angkola humor attaches to ambiguities of kin term usage, when a person's speaking partner can be recognized as either one of two mutually exclusive relatives. For instance, for a male speaker, sometimes a young woman he was speaking to could be *ito*, unmarriageable clan sister, but, by other *tutur* calculations, she could be *boru tulang*, his eminently marriageable first cousin, his mother's brother's daughter. Angkola kinship valorizes marriages for men that "repeat" the marriages their fathers made a generation ago. So, if the older man from a lineage of the Siregar clan married a *boru* Lubis from Bungabondar Village, then his son (a Siregar, in these firmly patrilineal clans) should also seek out a *boru* Lubis from Bungabondar. To get the appropriate generation of *boru* Lubis, the young man should marry his mother's brother's daughter. Many *boru tulang* marriages in Sipirok were rather generic and did not entail exact cross-cousin unions.

In this system, a woman ideally should repeat the marriage pattern of her father's sister. So, if a woman was a *boru* Regar, and her father's sister (another *boru* Regar, one generation back) had married a Harahap clansman of Batu na Dua Village, then the younger woman should repeat that, marrying (if she really follows the rules, which few do) her father's sister's son, her *anak namboru*. People who stand in this particular cousin relationship to each other[23] participate in a joking relationship of comfortable and sometimes even salacious banter. They are *pareban* to each other. Angkola Batak has several joking relationships structured into speech by *tutur*.

[23] Anthropologists call these cousins matrilateral cross cousins.

By Week Two of my stay in Sipirok, I was already being called Boru Regar, daughter of the Siregar clan, given my status as Bapak G. W.'s pupil. This was not a case of mere game playing involving some informal clan adoption of the visitor. *Hata Angkola* simply does not work unless every interlocutor is imagined to be related to every other person in the Angkola universe by either clan ties or a marriage alliance relationship. By dubbing me a *boru* Regar one generation younger than Bapak G. W.'s cohort, it became possible for people to speak to me (and, all importantly, conversational partners could avoid recourse to that crass, clueless "you"). A suitable kin term of address (father's sister, *namboru;* sister in the lineage, *ito;* child's child, *ompung*, and many more) was always the more polite choice in conversation, showing intelligence and social grace.

By these calculations, as a young *boru* Regar, I was *parumaen* to Ompu Elpi. We were both Siregar women and since she was reckoned in *tutur* to be Bapak G. W.'s sister, she was my *namboru*, my father's sister—the mother of my prospective husband. The point was moot, as most of her sons were married, living far away, or, in the case of Noan (the last one to leave home), only sixteen years old. At the time, Noan was living in Medan with his older sister Eme, finishing high school.

Suffice it to note here that Lesson One and my informal chats with Ompu Elpi about *tutur* had already taught me that Angkola Batak made finer, more precise distinctions among family relationships than did Bahasa Indonesia. This was an important component of Bapak G. W.'s and Ompu Elpi's sense that *hata Angkola* was a subtler, more discriminating tongue than the national language, fond though they were of the latter.

We continued on, still in Lesson One. The other Angkola pronouns I learned were *ia,* he or she; *halahi*, they (from *halak-i*, those people); *hita* ("we," including the listener or listeners), and *hami* ("we," exclusive of listeners). So, now I could say, *Hita mardalan tu sikola, Hami marlojong tu saba, Si Pantas kehe tu pasar,* and so on. I also tried out, "*Au mardalan tu pasar,*" but Bapak G. W. winced at that. Not only was my use of "I" egotistical, but I needed to learn polite word order. All of my baby sentences, above, were grammatically allowable, but it was sometimes simply more lovely to say, "*Mardalan hita tu sikola,*" and so on. If I wanted to add a bit of emphasis, I could say, "*Mardalan tu sikola do hita,*" to give the utterance some verve and pacing. Another useful word was "*ma,*" which provided emphasis in much the same way. I could say "*Kehe ma*!" or "Go on and go!" My formal lessons were giving me an artificially rigid understanding of word order. Reading selections from South Tapanuli children's schoolbooks soon helped to remedy that.

More Family Talk: From Lesson Three

Not phased by my disquiet at learning how much I had to learn to be even passably competent at *martutur*, at "determining kin terms," Bapak G. W. plunged on with our lessons. While still in Lesson One, I learned to say: *Sian dia*? (*Darimana* in Indonesian, meaning "From where?") and *Tu dia*? (*Kemana,* to where?) He gave me some time markers: *ancogot* ("tomorrow," in that exact sense, but also, more generally, in the future); *natuari* (yesterday); *annon* (a bit later on), *nangkin* (a bit before now); and *saonnari* (now). As with Indonesian, Angkola Batak has no obligatory tensing of verbs.

A speaker can choose to employ the word *giot* to indicate that a verb action will take place in the future, as in *Giot kehe hita tu pasar* (where *kehe* means "go"), but orientation in time is generally provided by context. Complexities in the language lie elsewhere.

By the end of Lesson One (with much help from Bapak G. W., since I had not yet memorized all these new words), I could combine some of my basic sentence patterns with the names of nearby villages that I knew about. We were all going out to a church party (a church building event) in the small settlement of Janjimauli soon, so I used that village name; I had been invited to a *horja* buffalo sacrifice feast out in Batu na Dua, so I relied on that place name as well. I could say,

Ancogot giot kehe hita tu Janjimauli.
Tomorrow (in the future) we go to Janjimauli.

Natuari kehe Si Hamzah tu Batu na Dua.
Yesterday Si Hamzah went to Batu na Dua.

By Lesson Two, Bapak G. W. had begun to ask me, *Biasi*? Why? I could then say things like "*Giot kehe au tu pasar di* (at, in) *Janjimauli.*" I still had to see the pattern in Indonesian first, on Bapak G. W.'s chalkboard, before I could come up with an "Angkola version."

Dison meant "right here." I could say, "*Giot kehe hita ancogot tu bioscop, dison di Sipirok.*" Sipirok did have a movie house, showing Indian love story films in which everybody on screen sang. By Lesson Two, I could comment: "*Inda kehe au tu bioscop di Sipirok on*" (*on*, right here). *Inda* formed a negative and also served as a basic "No." For instance, "*Kehe Ompung tu Janjimauli*?" "*Inda.*" But to come right out and say "no" lacked nuance. It was better to hedge.

In instructions to me about my homework for each afternoon, Bapak G. W. made something clear that I already knew from studying Indonesian back home: I should take all of our basic sentence forms, in turn, and spend hours substituting new prompt words (the place names I knew, the verbs, the pronouns, and so on). This would give me dozens of grammatically correct, if somewhat inane, sentences to write out in my notebook and to recite. Ompu Elpi was often out of the house in the afternoons, or resting in her room, so I could prattle away at my homework task without disturbing her. She sold cloth in the market on Mondays and Thursdays and also directed the women's choir at church; she was busy throughout the week.

The next morning, and throughout our formal lessons, which lasted until the next February, Bapak G. W. would start our sessions by writing out a sample sentence in Angkola on the chalkboard. Say, "*Mardalan Si Johannes tu pasar di Janjimauli*" (*mardalan* is the verb for "to walk"). He would then look at me pointedly and say something like, "*Batu na Dua*" or "*marlojong*" or "*Ompu Elpi*" or "*ia.*" I was to insert the prompt word into the sentence appropriately and say the whole statement aloud. He liked me to repeat each answer two or three times. Clearly an accomplished language teacher, Bapak G. W. had independently invented the same sort of substitution drill that John Wolff has his Indonesian language instructors use when they teach with the *Beginning Indonesian* books.

Lesson Two also introduced a new command—"*Baen do!*"—meaning "Do it," "Make it," which my teacher used to command me to take a prompt word and "do" a

new version of a sentence. The "*do*" added emphasis, as noted. Angkola Batak had several of these particles. *Do* and *ma* added flavor and emphasis to statements, making them commands or, at least, highly recommended actions. Sipirok retired teachers, especially, did not hesitate to take a commanding tone at times.

Lesson Two and the beginning of Lesson Three gave me more verbs (*mangaligi*, one of many words in Angkola for "to look at"; *mulak*, which would be *pulang* in Indonesian, meaning "to come home"). I now also had more words for things: *bagas* (house, not to be confused with the *bagas* of *dibagasan*, "inside of something"); *harejo* (work, very similar, I noted, to *kerja* in Indonesian); *motor* (motor vehicle, usually meaning my favorite, a Bus Sibualbuali). None of us in my Sipirok social circle had a car, though I gained some notoriety by reporting that I had a driver's license back home in America. The fact that my mother—Ompui, that dear old *ompu*—as well as my father back in Maryland both drove cars occasioned some surprise as well. They did not have chauffeurs? I was asked. Well, no. People in Sipirok thought that since my father worked for the federal government in Washington, DC, surely he would have a driver.

My new Sipirok friends were worried about Ompui, my mother, though. Once they discovered that I was an only child, now so very far away from home (and unmarried! no grandchildren for Ompui yet), they predicted that my mother must be so sad and anxious about me that she was rapidly losing weight from worry. I put this comment in a letter home and found out later that this prediction had given my mother a chuckle. In 1974, in Sumatra's pre-email era (and, in fact, in Sipirok's pre-international-phone-service period), the only way I could communicate with my family was by airmail letter. Unfortunately, the Sipirok postmaster liked me so much that he decided to give me a cut rate on airmail stamps, and so, for some weeks, none of my letters got through to the United States. After I started mailing my missives from the bigger town of Padangsidimpuan, I discovered the proper postage required for such letters and could then remind the Sipirok postal clerks of the amount (in an indirect manner, needless to add).

It did take me months more, though, to learn that I needed to muscle my way past competitors in the post office to get to the clerk selling the stamps; when others, even old *ompung*s, cut right in front of me in "line," I originally tended to defer to them. I was learning about another side of Sipirok social etiquette. People in town considered themselves more *halus*, more refined and smooth than the Toba Batak, but the raucous, highly competitive post-office scene belied this. Sharp elbows helped get one to that stamp window. I was beginning to stand up for myself as a *bekbek* Boru Regar—a Boru Regar who is bossy and says and does what is on her mind.

Lesson Three also introduced me to our first formal reading selection from an Angkola Batak children's primer. Angkola children's books soon became a favorite part of the lessons for me, and helped me to build up my vocabulary and also to see well-crafted real sentences, not just ones simplified enough so that I could readily understand them. I could then use these in afternoon homework as sophisticated models for my word substitution drills and for my (endless) pattern practices.

South Tapanuli teachers have a large, delightful repertoire of young children's schoolbooks to draw upon in teaching youngsters to read and write Angkola Batak.

The one Bapak G. W. used for Lesson Three was H. D. M. Siregar's *Dasar 3*, then in use in the Sipirok elementary schools. *Dasar* means "basic" in Indonesian; this was a primer for early readers. Our selection was entitled "*Dainang*," "My Mother." However, the type of loyalty to one's parents encouraged in this poem, I was discovering outside my lessons, was only part of the story about power relationships in Sipirok. When Bapak G. W. and his circle of old friends talked to me in Indonesian about New Order control of South Tapanuli, they showed little of the obsequious obedience to authority modeled in our reading selection about an imagined child's idealized relationship to *Dainang*. I was learning that older Sipirok residents spoke in two voices about power.

"*Dainang*" paints a portrait of sweetly harmonious family life and gave me some terrific sentence formats to follow. The poem goes as follows, with Bapak G. W.'s Indonesian translations to the right and my English translations included as well. I have kept the latter artificially close to the original.

Dainang

Inda marnaso huida dainang. Mother works unstoppingly, I see.	*Tidak berhenti-henti aku lihat ibuku.*
Manyogot mardahan. Mornings [she] cooks.	*Kalau pagi, bermasak.*
Dung mangan, mamasu pinggan. After [we] eat, [she] washes dishes.	*Setelah makan, mencuci piring.*
Manyapu, pasimpan panjaman. [She] sweeps the floor and picks up (things).	*Pakai sapu, menyimpan ...*
Kehe muse dope manyabun. Then off [she] goes to wash clothes.	*Pergilah dia mencuci lagi.*
Ari-ari marusaho. Day in and day out she works hard.	*Tiap hari, berusaha.*
Manambus harejonia. Many are her tasks.	*Bermacam-macam pekerjaannya.*
Sasaulak hutolongi, huhul marorot Every so often I help out, often by watching	*Sekali-kali aku menolong,*
Anggingku. my little brother.	*Sekali-kali menjaga adikku.*
Lalu paias pakarangan. Then off [she] goes to clean up the front yard.	*Lalu membersihkan pekarangan.*
Atehe dongan! Hey, good friend!	*Begitulah, kawan!*
Ulang durako tu ama ina. Never be a bother to Dad 'n Mom.	*Jangan tidak mempedulikan kepada bapak ibu.*
Halahi do na napauliuli hita They are the ones who take good care of us	*Mereka yang memelihara kita*

Sian na menek lopus magodang *Mulai kecil, sampai (sudah menjadi) besar.*
From when [we're] small til [we're] grown.

Burangir ni Sabatolang *Sirih dari Kampung Sabatolang*
Betel quid from Sabatolang

Tolu ranting karakona *Tiga ranting daunnya*
Three stems are its leaves.

Isa na jais marnatobang *Siapa yang tidak mempedulikan orang tuanya*
Whosoever does not care anything about parents

Marratus ribu tilakona *Beribu-ribu keburukannya*
Their wickedness numbers in the hundreds and thousands.

Halak nadurako tuanya *Manusia yang tidak mempedulikan orang*
Anyone who does not care about [their] parents

Ronjom ibana tu narako! *Terbenam dia ke naraka!*
Will be buried in hell!

That conclusive threat caught my attention, but this poem also held my interest because of its grammar and word forms. Reciting it out loud after Bapak G. W. read each line to me did not only help me polish my version of Sipirok's lilting, soft-toned *hata Angkola*, it also reinforced several things I was learning about the language. To wit, many statements made total semantic and stylistic sense without human actors. Lines 2 through 7, for instance, all refer back to one earlier mention of Dainang, the speaker's mother. And, the most elegant Angkola sentences were often succinct ("*Manyogot mardahan*," "Mornings [she] cooks"). Oral styles enlivened printed prose ("*Atehe dongan*!," "Hey, good friend," an exclamation familiar from everyday spoken dialogue in town). And, while formal Angkola grammar certainly allows a speaker to say, for instance, *au tolongi*, meaning "I help (someone) out," this poem's author forefronts the silkier construct, *hutolongi*. Sometimes Angkola speakers would carry over that construction into their Indonesian. A blizzard of *kupikir, kubilang, kulari, kumakan*, and so on would result, as opposed to *saya pikir* and so on (I think, I say, I run, I eat). This confused me in my first days in Sipirok when I would hear Indonesian spoken there.

Bapak G. W.'s translation of "*Dainang*" into Indonesian highlighted another feature of Angkola Batak speech and literature, the frequent use of the *–nya* possessive to help form a complete sentence without mentioning an overt human subject. He writes, "*Bermacam-macam pekerjaannya*," a close translation of the Angkola Batak that includes *harejonia*, "her work." As opposed to writing, "She does many sorts of tasks" (possible in a Batak language, surely), the poet uses "Many are her tasks."

The poem also includes abundant alliteration, something any competent *hata Angkola* speaker uses to flavor his or her speech, as when giving a gift (the exact imagery evoked in oratory). The poem's repeated sounds helped make it fun for children, and me, to recite. It will come as no surprise that Bapak G. W. encouraged me to memorize "*Dainang*" so that I could recite its lines by heart. His strategy was right, pedagogically speaking. Once I had committed a line like "*Sasaulak hutolongi huhul mamorot anggingku*" to memory, I could take ownership of its grammatical forms and begin to play with it, making variations. This particular sentence was fairly complex, and it took me a good while to memorize it securely enough so that I could use it and

its offshoots effortlessly. In later years, many Angkola speakers have told me how literary sounding and poetic my spoken Batak is. I suspect that poems like this one from my lessons, and Bapak G. W.'s insistence on memorization and rote recital, are to thank for that, for good or ill.

The paean to Mother ends with a *pantun*-style, four-line verse (*Burangir ni Sabatolang*, Betel leaf quid of Sabatolang Village ...). *Pantun* are conventionalized rhymes. This verse showed me another characteristic feature of *hata Angkola* found in formal speech and literary prose, in texts ranging from children's books to 1920s romantic novels, and (remarkably enough) in 1920s and 1930s newspaper stories in the Batak language vernacular press in Tapanuli.[24] Versifying a sentiment makes it sweeter, this fondness for *pantun*s seemed to say.

The place of the poem "*Dainang*" in my language lessons had another, more overtly political dimension, however. The imagined child reader/reciter is almost syrupy in his or her praise for dear mother (the *Da-* particle makes it clear that this poem is about the recitalist's own mother, not a generic relative). The child of the poem identifies moral goodness with complete deference to sainted parents. The child performs his or her filial duties without complaint and with an energy to equal Dainang's tireless daily contributions to the household's welfare. Everyone in the social world of the poem knows his or her place and seeks to meld totally into those roles, in what can only be termed an extremely hierarchical (not to mention sexist) gender arrangement. Mother cooks, washes dishes, cleans, sweeps the house and front yard, and tends to the children, never pausing to catch her breath. Her just reward is the undying gratitude of her remarkably well-behaved offspring. However, while reciting this poem to myself during homework hours I often thought: This is *not* how Sipirok mothers and children behave. Ompu Elpi and her family were a case in point.

Ompu Elpi did a good deal of the cooking for her family when the eleven children were small, but she divided up the housecleaning tasks among all her sons and daughters. She made sure that the boys, as well as the girls, knew how to manage basic food shopping and cooking. Some of them went on to become creative bakers of Sipirok's justly famous butter cakes and cookies (modeled on Dutch desserts and baked in profusion for New Year's Day. On this holiday, Christian families give some of their pastries to their Muslim kinfolk, and the latter give back sweets of the same sort on Idul Fitri, the holy day ending the Fasting Month each year).

Beyond making her children pull their own weight in household upkeep, Ompu Elpi insisted on another accomplishment: that each son and daughter should earn a post-high school degree. As a result, she was mother to an accountant, a big city journalist, an assistant pharmacist, several schoolteachers, and a nuclear physicist with a doctorate, who had spent a post-doc in Paris (he worked for the nuclear power commission in Jakarta). Ompu Elpi raised those children to think, not to praise slavishly the virtues of Dainang. These critical thinking skills were central to their adult personalities.

[24] Editors, reporters, and stringers often burst into verse in the Angkola Batak weeklies and bi-weeklies, such as *Sipirok Pardomoenan* and *Poestaha*, in the 1910s through the 1920s. Sometimes the verses appeared in stories about *adat* ceremonies, but sometimes the verse form would be used for a task such as offering a praise poem to the newspaper itself (*Poestaha* published several of these in the 1920s, on page one).

Bapak G. W. soon began tutoring me in ways that fostered this same quality. He certainly gave me hortatory little poems like "Dainang" to study in our lessons, and he and his fellow retirees would indeed sometimes say pleasant, don't-rock-the-boat sorts of things to government officials in town (we had a judge, a district *camat* town manager, military officials, and the police chief). In public, Bapak G. W. and his friends were often models of civic compliance. But, they spoke differently in private. After several weeks, I was drawn into this circle, and they proved to be astoundingly frank with me when talking about the failings of the New Order.

One example shocked me. Bapak G. W. and the other retired teachers in town generally had little spare cash, unless their family happened to own a great deal of inherited rice-paddy land. They therefore depended on the regular scheduled delivery of their government pension payments so that they could buy fresh meat in the weekly market, pay their electricity bills, buy clothes, and purchase coffee and tea (necessities in Sipirok, which can be cold at night). Many needed their pensions to purchase rice itself, the universal staple in Sipirok. But they felt anxious about those pensions, fearing that the payments could be summarily cut off if they happened to offend the federal administration. So, each time the New Order in Jakarta arranged for a mock national presidential election or even a provincial congressional election, these pensioners would routinely vote for Golkar, President Soeharto's party. They despised the New Order, but kept voting it in, out of a clear economic motive.

On other fronts, however, they grumbled constantly among themselves, and now to me, about the regime's perfidy (the theft of Sumatra's riches was a heated theme in these conversations) and inherent political corruption. They told me often that those who were not close business or family cronies of the Soeharto in-group would never get a break in New Order Indonesia, not by getting accepted into important schools, not in getting business permits, not in securing a job in the public school system.

Sometimes these critiques took sharper form. One example from late 1974 occurred when I was still engaged in my early language lessons, and the incident concerned me, for it seemed to threaten my research.

Our local *polisi intel* for Sipirok was an intelligence police officer (not a real policeman), who was charged with routing out any remaining PKI (Partai Komunis Indonesia, Indonesian Communist Party) influence or agents still at work in the county district. This was nine years after Gerakan 30-September and the massive military crackdown on the Partai Komunis Indonesia nationwide, the massacre of known and alleged communists, and the imprisonment of several graded categories of supposed political subversives. *Kecamatan* Sipirok had seen a few of its citizens imprisoned for PKI associations, but everyone I talked to in town agreed that our *polisi intel* had very little to occupy his time by 1974. One day, when I had gone to the sub-provincial capital of Padangsidimpuan for several hours to do some bookstore shopping (or rather, bookstall shopping), I came home to find out from Ompu Elpi and Bapak G. W. that Mr. *Polisi Intel* had come by the house while I was away, intent on seeing me and serving me with a summons to come to his office immediately. When Bapak G. W. relayed the charge to me, I understood it was ludicrous: the *polisi intel* officer was accusing me of harboring radio instruments in my room in Ompu Elpi's house for sending spy messages outside the country. We figured out later that he had possibly mistaken my tape recorder for such a nefarious machine.

Yet when hearing the charge, of course, I panicked. How could I ever disprove such a bizarre and malicious lie about me and my presence in town? I had all the correct research visas and research clearances from the national science agency in Jakarta, the Lembaga Ilmu Pengetahuan Indonesia (LIPI). But still, a rogue *polisi intel* cop could make matters dicey for me in Sipirok. Perhaps I would have to leave, and my dissertation hopes would collapse. Bapak G. W. told me just to calm down and simply ignore the summons. This was Bapak G. W. in his anti-"*Dainang*" mode.

The *polisi intel* is just setting you up to demand a cash bribe, he assured me. "*Jangan meladeni*," he told me in Indonesian: "Don't pay him any mind, don't attend to him." I still remember that phrase of Bapak G. W.'s, because it had such chutzpah. I was afraid to disobey the summons in its entirety (I had never had any dealings with any police before, innocent that I was). Several days later, I did end up going over to the *polisi intel* man's office (which was part of the *camat* town manager's suite of rooms near the town post office, located on a little hill). But I was accompanied by Bapak G. W. and Ompu Raja Doli Siregar, the ritual speechmaker and lineage chief, who was by then giving me *adat* lessons several times each week in the late afternoons. In Sipirok, *adat* referred to inherited traditions linked to oratory and obligations toward the dead. Raja Doli was an *adat* chief of high repute. At their insistence, I brought along my passport and all of my official Indonesian government research clearances—and my ultra-impressive personal letter of recommendation from my department back at the University of Chicago (a letter adorned with a magnificent red stamp, added at the suggestion of my dissertation committee chair, Barney Cohn).

I sat down at the *polisi intel*'s desk, nervous but trying to hide my agitation. Bapak G. W. sat off to the side, brandishing his long, ivory cigarette holder. Raja Doli, dressed as for an *adat* conclave, in a business suit and formal waistcloth, paced. It was a stand-off. I assured the officer that I would not, could not think of doing something so terrible as sending spy messages from Indonesia. None of the three of us on my side dared mention that there would probably not be a great many state secrets in Sipirok to send out, whatever the case. Information on coffee futures? Trends in gold prices at the town's jewelry shops? The latest inside information on puffs of smoke emanating from the town's mostly quiescent volcano, Sibualbuali? We kept our own counsel, and the *polisi intel* officer was not bold enough to ask for a bribe in front of my companions. To save face, he demanded that I provide him with photocopies of every report on my study that I was sending in to LIPI every three months. I told him I would be most happy to comply. Our *tim riset* (research team, Ompu Raja Doli's term) beat a strategic departure, in parade formation, and no bribe was ever paid.

The *polisi intel* basically faded from the scene after this incident, as far as my work was concerned, for the ensuing two and a half years of my stay in town and in a nearby village. Bapak G. W.'s and Ompu Raja Doli's real courage in standing up to the most egregiously corrupt agents of the New Order was entirely typical of them, I was to find. I discovered from this incident that Bapak G. W. was not teaching me to speak *hata Angkola* via poems like the obsequious "Dainang" in order to shape me into an automaton living in a strict social hierarchy. He was teaching me to speak up for myself, at least in those small spaces within the New Order domain where we could get away with asserting our rights in the face of *korupsi*, an Indonesian behavior familiar to everyone in town. Did my standing as an American foreigner give me extra

protection from more dangerous threats of official corruption than that posed by this one intelligence officer? I cannot deny that.

Speaking of Rajas: Defining Language Excellence in the New Order

Our five-day-a-week lessons continued on through the following February, except during those days when I decided to take the bus to Padangsidimpuan for several hours. Officially, I always traveled out of town to accomplish some laudable task, such as shopping for books, as noted above, but sometimes I would go to Sidimpuan just to get a brief respite from the drumbeat of language drills and afternoon homework assignments. At least I got the weekends off. But on Sundays I was expected to go to church, and that duty entailed several hours of listening to sermons delivered in *hata Angkola*. Pendeta (Pastor) Siregar used sentences that were beyond me, for the most part, for my first several months in Sipirok, but I got intense listening practice as a member of his congregation. In church, I would try to read my hymnal, which traced back to the early days of the Rhenish mission and used elegant, spare *hata Angkola*. The early Protestant German and Dutch preachers' work in writing and publishing such texts helped set the standards for "fine Angkola Batak" of later years.

I was paying Bapak G. W. US$5.00 a lesson, each lesson a morning's work. This pleased him and also made sense given my grant calculations; I had already decided to try to stay longer than the eighteen months for which the fellowship was budgeted. The US$100 a month I paid Ompu Elpi for room and board also worked well for both of us. Phone costs, computer costs, and television cable fees were nil; personal computers were not yet on the market, and Ompu Elpi had no telephone or television. We did have electricity from 4 PM to 7 AM, however, a distinction for the town. Villages outside Sipirok did not get *listrik* until later in my stay; this innovation in the farming areas was a boon that the villagers credited to the New Order (I base this conclusion on my experience in a village located fifteen kilometers outside Sipirok, where I lived for nine months in 1976, studying and tape-recording oratory there).

I had a manual typewriter for typing my fieldnotes and lessons, a child's school notebook for a fieldwork diary, two tape recorders, and a camera. To make spare copies of all my notes for safekeeping, I used carbon paper, purchased at one of Sipirok's stationary and notions stores near the main market. I stored my study materials in construction paper folders, in boxes, underneath my bed. I was afraid to put these files in the room's tall bookcase against the wall. At night, I would hear the *monci*, the small mice, crunching away in there on the old books from her children's schooldays that Ompu Elpi had stored on the shelves. These mice only rarely ventured out into my bedroom's open spaces; when they did, I would seek out Si Huting and toss him into the room for a spell, to hunt.

Months passed. I started to attend *adat* ceremonies and got permission to tape-record the ritual speeches delivered at these events. Most people I talked to seemed pleased that their *adat* was finally getting some international attention. Some told me with disapproval that previous visiting scholars always only went to Toba. By October 1974, Bapak G. W. and his friend Hormat Pulungan, another Christian, from Sibadoar, had recruited Ompu Raja Doli Siregar to come to the house and give me *adat* lessons two afternoons a week. These sessions consisted mostly of Raja Doli's recitations of

sample speeches for all the speaking parts for all the major *adat* ceremonies. So, for example, Raja Doli would deliver all the traditional speeches for a wedding, including the bride's departure speech, delivered as she leaves her natal household, her *andung* lament when she crosses out through her parent's front doorway for the last time, her new father's sister's/mother-in-law's speech to welcome her to her marital home, and on and on. Previous to these orations, Raja Doli had given Bapak G. W. and me the several speaking parts for the long brideprice negotiation session, and the speech the bridegroom's mother gives as she accepts the *boli* (the brideprice, in cash).

As Sipirok *adat* has many ceremonial occasions that demand fine oratory, and since Raja Doli was intent on taking us through the full repertoire of the speeches one might expect to hear, over time, in a well-to-do household, we all settled down to a long series of *adat* lessons. They did go on for many months. My cash payments to Raja Doli probably helped out his household; his family had little money, and he was a rice farmer and retired Sibualbuali bus driver. I was not sure why I was studying *adat* in this way, but I deferred to Bapak G. W.'s judgment that this would be a good thing for an anthropologist to do.

Raja Doli had prefaced these lessons with an initial session devoted to giving me the names of all the special plants associated with *adat* ceremonies. He brought botanical samples to the house, and I duly took photographs. He arranged betel quid on one of Ompu Elpi's big ceramic plates and told me what each part of the quid "said." Surprisingly, then, right in our first lesson, Raja Doli was already introducing me to some of Sipirok's most elusive high registers of ritual speech, the *surat tumbago holing* (the ancient leaf letters).

I had a good Angkola–Dutch dictionary by this point, which helped me in my new course of study. This was H. J. Eggink's 1936 *Angkola- en Mandailingsch-Bataksch/Nederlandsch Woordenboek*.[25] This book had been a gift to me and Bapak G. W. from one of his former students, a man who now worked as a school administrator in the public schools down in Padang, West Sumatra. This man had heard through the former-students-of-Bapak-G.-W. grapevine (a large community) that their old mentor had taken on a new acolyte, an American who was studying *hata Angkola*. Bapak G. W. was delighted to see this dictionary, as he knew it from the old days but did not have a copy.

By November, I was gaining enough fluency in *hata Angkola* so that, when Ompu Elpi and I chatted at breakfast or dinner, I could sometimes succeed in switching our conversation fully over to that language from Indonesian. She knew that I was still much more fluent in the national language than I was in Angkola Batak, and sometimes she just wanted to make things easier for us, so that we could say more, in which case she would shift into Indonesian. Bapak G. W.'s wife, Ompu Christi, did the same thing, as did their young niece Si Ida, who had lived with the family since early childhood. Si Ida was finishing high school in town at the time and did a good deal of the housework.

Language lessons Four through Twenty-Six pushed me much more deeply into studying Angkola noun formation (fearsome) and verb structure (perhaps even more

[25] H. J. Eggink, *Angkola- en Mandailingsch-Bataksch/Nederlandsch Woordenboek* (Bandung: A. J. Nix and Co., 1936).

so). I also practiced the comparative (yellow, *gorsing;* yellower, *gumorsing;* red, *rara,* redder, *rumara*). The Batak languages have infixes, as Van der Tuuk warns the student. Infixes involve the insertion of a syllable, after pulling out the first letter and placing it at the start of a word. I had encountered a few of these in Indonesian, such as *guruh-gemuruh,* "rolling thunder." But standard Indonesian used these rarely; infixes occurred mostly in literary language. Angkola Batak uses infixes constantly, since speakers must employ them as part of the simple comparative. Bapak G. W. drilled me on this (*hipas,* fast; *humipas,* faster) until saying the comparative came naturally to me.

He also let me in on some of *hata Angkola*'s many plays on words. These made me smile. A favorite: a special name for Ompui, Tiger in the Forest. The normal word for tiger in *hata Angkola* is *babiat.* The sound tigers make, their growl, is *maung-aung.* So, a special sobriquet for them is Maung-Aung-er. A verse tells Siregar clan descendants to fence in Ompui's pawprint on the jungle floor with a miniature fence of little sticks if they come upon it; this shows respect and deference to Tiger.

Another favorite: a name for four-legged creatures, *Siopat-pat.* In *hata Angkola,* the number four is *opat.* Leg or foot is *pat. Siopat-pat* showed up in many of the children's tales I was reading in my lessons by this time.

By Lesson Twenty-Seven, I was ready for another register of speech, Bapak G. W. decided. This lesson took us into the indirectly phrased ritual speech forms used in *turi-turian* chanted epics and in the high oratory of *horja* water buffalo sacrifice feasts. It would take me years to do some justice to these elevated speech registers, by translating them into English, but here in this early lesson on oratory and its written and print forms, Bapak G. W. was giving me a primer. For this task we used excerpts from a schoolbook by South Tapanuli teacher and administrator Baginda Marakub Marpaung, entitled *Impola ni hata, parsiajaran ni sikola lanjutan* (Essences of Words: A Lesson Book for Secondary School). This book was used as a text in Batak literature classes in Sipirok and Sidimpuan in middle school. It could be purchased at the local bookstalls near the market. The small volume was a favorite of Batak literature teachers because Marpaung salted his reading selections with fine oratorical phrasing.

This approach came through particularly in Marpaung's ongoing series of chapters about Si Lundu ni Pahu, a Sumatran forestlands hero. This resourceful youngster was an adventurer and musketeer. The story was set in the past ("When, exactly?" I asked Bapak G. W. "Centuries and centuries ago," he answered), in the distant era when royal houses were surrounded by sumptuous moats full of fat golden carp, and when water gardens dominated the landscape near these palatial homes. Si Lundu ni Pahu was a prince on the cusp of manhood, a boy setting off on his jungle exploits, off to fight enemies both human and supernatural. He was on his path to marriage and adulthood; he was on his journey to full status as a glowing nobleman with a magic fighting suit made of mirror fragments and jewels. This was a Malay-style tale, in other words.

Storylines of this sort concerning half-finished noble boys and their quests for maturity, marriage, and spiritual enlightenment were the core narratives of Angkola and Mandailing's great *turi-turian* chant cycles. These epics may have historical ties to the sung stories and court epics of Malay royal courts in peninsular Malaysia and south and east Sumatra.

In Lesson Twenty-Seven, Bapak G. W. had me reading aloud from *Impola ni Hata*'s chapter 1, entitled "Langka Si Lundu ni Pahu dioban-oban paruntunganna," or, in approximate English, "So off strides Si Lundu ni Pahu, carried along by his fate." It is noteworthy that Marpaung chose the Indonesian word *untung* (luck, fate) for his Batakized noun construction here—*paruntunganna*. I read the first lines aloud as follows (by this point in our lessons Bapak G. W. did not read first, but let me do so):

> Laho langka Si Lundu ni Pahu na patantan simanjojak pagayung alang tangan simangido i. Dilehen inangnia i ma disia sada tintin pusako na nipakena andorang di habujinganna najolo.
>
> Then off strode Si Lundu ni Pahu thrusting with legs-the-bold-striders, swinging his arms-the-askers-for-gifts at his side as he glided along. And so, his mother gave him an heirloom ring that she had worn back before when she was a young unmarried maiden.

These lines plunged the imagined Angkola schoolchild—and certainly me—into linguistic precincts where nothing important could ever be said bluntly or directly. All parts of the body were identified by their high-register names rather than by words from regular *hata Angkola* conversation. To cite another example: the everyday word for "head" was *ulu* in *hata Angkola*, but in this high register, "head" was "head-the-honored-bearer-of-burdens." *Turi-turian* speech of this sort, Bapak G.W. made clear to me in side comments, was one of *hata Angkola*'s great achievements.

Si Lundu ni Pahu continued to stride along, I found, sounding out the hard words:

> Langka ma antong danak na dangol ni andung i na siak panomuan bayo na manunggal sadalanan i—marapi-api dipunca bobat marsupak gonggam simangido disi golap disi potangna, disi tolap disi modomna, tu tonga ni tombak situmalun ...
>
> So along strode that sad lamented child, that child of most, most unlucky fate, that boy going along all alone on his life journey—lighting his fires with no more than his belt buckle, taking measurements by hand, whenever night would fall that would be his evening, wherever he happened to arrive that would be his spot to sleep, out there in the middle of the limitless deep forest ...

This register of special speech would take me years to comprehend, as Bapak G. W. must have known. Few in Sipirok could understand its allusions; city-born Batak understood even less. Why did Bapak G. W. insist on including this level of ritual speech relatively early on in our *hata Angkola* lessons? *Turi-turian* chant speech was *tabo* (delicious to savor, to eat), for one thing. For another, Bapak G. W. was giving me clear evidence of *hata Angkola*'s luxuriance and intellectual challenge. *Hata Indonesia*, as we were calling it by then, paled in comparison, according to this view. Bapak G. W. was particularly critical of the jingoistic version of Indonesian used by town officials in their fusty proclamations. The county officials would be invited to attend an hour or so (plus a meal) of major *horja* buffalo sacrifice feasts, but typically could not manage to deliver even a rudimentary oration in *hata Angkola*. They would slip into Indonesian and pepper that language with words such as "*pembangunan*" (development) and *modernisasi*. Bapak G. W. told me that these poor performances vitiated these officials' claims to be fostering *adat* ways in TapSel.

In ensuing months, we worked closely with Ompu Raja Doli as he dictated more sample, high oratory speeches to us in lessons, for my tape recorder. Bapak G. W. and I would spend the following days writing out transcripts and figuring out what each oratory phrase meant. My *hata Angkola* vocabulary increased exponentially. This intense pattern of study intensified further when the three of us worked with a *turi-turian* bard and tape-recorded a two-night-long version of the Datuk Tuongku Tuan Malim Leman epic. To help us understand that even more esoteric level of ritual speech, Bapak G. W. and I worked with one of his former students, Baginda Hasudungan Siregar, then a middle-school teacher and raja of growing repute.

By December 1974, Raja Doli had me delivering my own short orations in high *hata Angkola* in the *horja* feasts to which he was now taking me for my research. He would slip me the words beforehand and spring my astounding oratory facility on his unsuspecting fellow rajas. Bapak G. W. thought that this was hilarious. My memorization skills increased apace.

I stayed on in Sipirok and in a nearby village for over two years more, using the time to continue my study of oratory, but also to work with Bapak G. W. on some Angkola language literary texts from the 1920s. I left for the United States in January 1977, sent off on my journey with a formal *adat*-like ceremony of leave-taking, complete, of course, with many ornate ritual speeches delivered by the guests. I cried; Ompu Elpi cried. Bapak G. W. wrote me letters regularly once I got home, completed my dissertation, and started a tenure-track job at Ohio University. He was well for some months more, but then passed away after suffering several strokes in 1980, before I could undertake my first return visit to Sipirok, the next year. Ompu Elpi and Raja Doli continued to help me for the next several years during my repeated visits. Baginda Hasudungan and I have worked together for many years since 1980.

Conclusion: Hidden *Poda* Lessons

A wider perspective can add dimension here at the end of this brief account of my work with Bapak G. W. in a few of our early lessons. The way that a "local language" was constructed for me during my lessons, and also the way that I was imagined in my dealings with my Sipirok mentors as a visiting anthropologist are worthy of mention.

"Angkola Batak" as a category, as a name for a language in the world, has a political life of considerable historical depth worth noting, as I realize in thinking back to my language lessons with this gentleman schoolman over thirty-five years ago. Bapak G .W. used that language tag, knowingly and strategically. Therein lay one of his more important hidden *poda* for me as his apt language pupil, and, as I suspect he could already foresee, as a future teacher in my own right.

In the Dutch East Indies, from the mid-1800s through the early decades of the twentieth century, pioneering descriptive linguists in the employ of the colonial state or the Protestant Christian missions mapped out large sectors of Sumatra in terms of which "ethnic people" spoke what "ethnic language." One of their classificatory

decisions was to dub the dialect of Batak spoken in Sipirok "Angkola Batak."[26] In part, this was because the government's administrative unit for this part of the highlands was identified by the same term as the related geographical area (meant also to correspond to "a people," the Angkola Batak). By the 1850s, Sipirok was becoming an important coffee depot town, so the colonial state had an economic interest in governance there. This was a situation that demanded clear-cut categorization schemes.

Decades later in the national period, and specifically under the New Order, these same linguistic maps continued to have salience for the public school system, for the Department of Education and Culture in its "*tradisi*" preservation projects, and for urban newspaper publishing. For instance, in the 1970s, the Medan dailies such as *Waspada* and *Sinar Indonesia Baru* often ran feature stories on the old speech ways of Karo Batak, Toba Batak, Angkola Batak, and so on. Sipirok's own educated elite, the schoolteacher circles I came to be thick as thieves with by late 1974 and 1975, often used this same terminology. They spoke to me of my efforts to learn "Angkola Batak," *hata Batak Angkola*.

As the name of a language, however, that term was somewhat fictional. As I quickly found out in 1974, the great majority of people in Sipirok whom I met in the 1970s (children, shopkeepers, Kampung Tinggi neighbors not in the school system, friends from church, Ompu Raja Doli's Muslim kinfolk from Padangbujur Village) did not use the words *hata Batak Angkola* or *hata Angkola* to refer to their home language. They would say, rather, that they spoke "*saro hita*," "our way of speaking." It seems that they were using "our way" to contrast with Bahasa Indonesia, the way of speaking used "out there" in the wider nation. But, in one of those language ironies so common in 1970s South Tapanuli, the phrase *saro hita* is an almost exact borrowing from the Indonesian words *cara kita*, "our way" of speaking. The supposed local language so many in Sipirok were so proud of had been deeply nationalized by such loan words from the language of state.

Bapak G. W. knew all this. He spoke *hata Angkola* in the face of all this, and he taught me to speak and love *hata Angkola* in this same social and aesthetic context. This was a political action as much as his help to me with the *polisi intel* officer had been. Bapak G. W. knew that most everyday people in Sipirok who had not had his excellent formal education in an old Kweekschool did not say they were speaking *hata Batak Angkola*. With great style and verve they spoke, they knew, *their own language*, an insider's medium of great beauty in a nation whose then-current ruling regime controlled state-level discourse in Indonesian and consigned languages like Sipirok's to quaint, antiquarian status. Bapak G. W. did not believe a word of this statist language ideology. He thus sought to teach me (his first captive anthropologist) a more glowing view of Sumatran language landscapes. Batak was better, recall that I observed earlier, noting my teachers' views. This was Bapak G. W.'s key epistemological teaching to me. Since I was a graduate student, and thus enamored of official ways of knowledge (many assumed), Bapak G. W. told me that he was teaching me to speak *hata Batak Angkola*. I am sure he thought I wanted that terminology to

[26] For an insightful discussion of similar categorization schemes and their politics, see Mary M. Steedly, "The Importance of Proper Names: Language and 'National' Identity in Colonial Karoland," *American Ethnologist* 23,3 (1996): 447–75.

structure our so-academically-serious language lessons together. But, at a more personal, interactional level, acting as my *Amang* in the Siregar clan and as a teacher with a willing, alert student, Bapak G. W. was teaching me *saro hita*. The great irony: our way of speaking was giving me not just fieldwork tools to use for the rest of my dissertation research, but new eyes to see the New Order.